

TLS Newsletter

Important Dates

October 16-17:

National Technical Advisory Committee Meeting, Anchorage.

October 28:

EED State Board of Education, Teleconference.

October 31— November 2:

Alaska School Health and Wellness Institute, Anchorage.

Applause!

- Thanks goes to Elizabeth Seitz and Debbie Soto for their work on the new school nutrition SMART reviews.
- Thanks to the TLS staff serving as liaisons working to support Priority, Focus and 1—and 2—star schools.

We appreciate your great work!

New EED Liaisons on the Job!

Brad Billings

The department has asked nine TLS staff to be EED Liaisons to support schools newly designated as 1-star and 2-star schools by the ASPI system. As part of the effort to implement the approved NCLB waiver and the new state accountability regulations which took effect October 16, these liaisons are the point-of-contact at the department for school principals as they implement the school improvement planning process. These liaisons are working to assist schools and districts as they become aware of the planning requirements, available support, and implementation timeline, and to help answer technical questions regarding the online planning tool Alaska STEPP (see last story of the newsletter to learn about STEPP).

No later than November 1 of each school year, a district shall prepare a school improvement plan for a school in the district that receives a star rating of one, two or three stars . . . and shall submit the plan to the department if the plan is for a school that received one or two stars. 4 AAC 06.845 (a)

Ninety-eight schools spread across 26 of Alaska's school districts are currently designated as 1- and 2-star schools and each is assigned one of our department liaisons. Communication and support to these schools in September and October has been focused around the school improvement planning process and has included district superintendents, district school improvement coordinators, and school level principals and process managers. While communication started with an e-mail to each district superintendent, the nature of assistance has been specialized depending upon the individual needs of each site. Liaison support has included e-mails, phone calls, webinars, tailored video teleconference trainings, and site visits for face-to-face assistance.

In addition to two full days of training here at the department over the last 2 months, liaisons continue to meet weekly to build consistency and to consider questions and challenges that individual schools are addressing as they implement their school improvement planning process.

With the fast-approaching submission date for school improvement plans of November 1, 2013, liaisons will be busy providing feedback to the schools they work with and assisting them in building a plan for implementation this school year.

EED Liaisons for One- and Two-Star Schools

Pattie Adkisson

Sheila Box

Margaret MacKinnon

Brad Billings

Patricia Farren

Cecilia Miller

Nicole Bourque

Angela Love

Kay Streeter

STEPPing into Site Visits

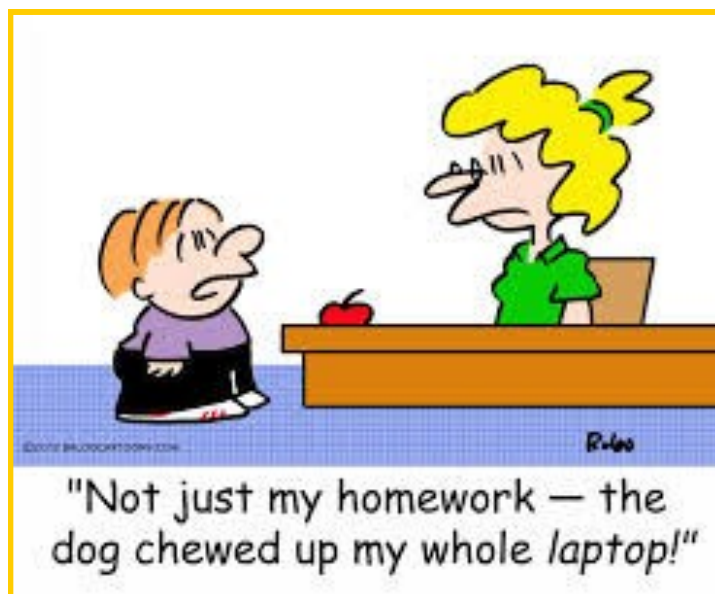
Sheila Box

It's always interesting to travel to a district and meet with the teachers and principals who work with students every day. For me, it's important to my work for two reasons: first, because I get to hear and see the stories, challenges, and successes of people who are working directly with kids, which I hope helps me to create more useful presentations and tools for them; and second, because it's a concrete reminder of the lens I always need to use to view what the work is actually for—not for reports, or spreadsheets, or compliance—but for kids.

As part of the new liaison program, I've already traveled to two districts and have had several phone conversations with principals. It is going to be both challenging and rewarding work. Two of us traveled to Lower Yukon a few weeks ago to provide training to principals in the district on the Alaska STEPP continuous improvement planning tool. The district is implementing a lot of exciting new things this year, and principals were both optimistic, and a little overwhelmed, at the same time. They were open to our presentation, but a little wary that it might be just “one more thing” they had to do. We gave an interactive presentation that allowed time for them to discuss amongst themselves how the tool might best serve their needs and to discover some useful features of the STEPP tool. At the end of the presentation there were several principals who told us they thought using STEPP would make organizing their staff and celebrating the work they do easier. A few principals had ideas about things we might put into STEPP in the future to make it even more useful for them, so we brought those ideas back for consideration, as part of our own process of improvement.

There are also times when principals or superintendents need to tell you about their challenges. I know that they are always keeping in mind what's best for the students that they know personally, and that it's important to listen, acknowledge and help where I can. I just returned from providing STEPP training to a very small alternative high school. This principal faces many challenges, and it was important for me to listen carefully to her as she explained those challenges. We then reworked the entire presentation to focus more on how she might use STEPP in her unique situation to document some of the work she and her community are already doing for her students.

We talked about how it might be good for one of her students to be on her planning team and give students more ownership and connection to the school and the real-world decisions that are made. And at the end, she said that STEPP maybe wasn't going to be as scary as she thought it was going to be and that documenting their work had been a challenge in the past. She thought STEPP would probably help her with that part of her work and said she was glad to have someone at the department she could call if she needed some help. I think that being able to provide that help is going to be the best part of my job as a liaison.



Alaska STEPP, which stands for **Steps Toward Educational Progress and Partnership**, is an online school improvement planning tool. It is based upon Indistar, a software template which 24 states currently use to serve school- and district-level improvement planning.

Since its development and customization for Alaska four years ago, several Alaska districts have adopted STEPP as a way to incorporate continuous, comprehensive, and team-oriented school improvement planning. With the approval of Alaska's ESEA Flexibility Waiver and the adoption of the new school accountability system, Alaska STEPP has become the required method of school improvement planning for 1-, 2-, and 3-star schools, as well as for priority and focus schools.

The tool is built around the six domains of effective schools: Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, Supportive Learning Environment, Professional Development, and Leadership. Within these six domains are 32 indicators against which school improvement teams can assess their school and guide improvement efforts. This tool is more than a software system that produces a plan for submission. It is designed to encourage a school improvement process that is ongoing and task driven, resulting in continuous engagement and improvement.

To support the nearly 20 new districts that will be using Alaska STEPP in their 1-, 2-, and 3-star schools, a series of six webinars have been delivered over the course of the last month to support staff new to the tool, those returning after past use needing a refresher, and district-level managers of the planning process. In addition, EED Liaisons have fielded individual requests for assistance in using the tool for the planning process.

For more information on Alaska STEPP or to dig deeper into the effective schools domains and indicators, please browse through the tools found on the C³G website under the Alaska STEPP tab of the orange support star.

FAQs

How does the work schools do with Alaska STEPP coordinate with the accreditation process of AdvancED?

There is flexibility in the regulatory language to allow for the accreditation process to replace STEPP during the year a school undergoes accreditation. As part of the accreditation process that occurs every five years, schools can submit Alaska STEPP plans to satisfy the accreditation-required school improvement plan if they so choose. Schools can use an alternative school planning format other than Alaska STEPP for accreditation if they so choose. During the four "off" years when schools are not undergoing the accreditation process, they are still required to use Alaska STEPP for the School Improvement Planning Process.

Vocabulary & Acronyms

ESEA: Elementary and Secondary Education Act (formerly referred to as NCLB or No Child Left Behind)

VTC: Video Teleconference

SIP: School Improvement Plan